DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 409 SP 031 918

AUTHOR Williams, Carolyn
TITLE Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate before and after Completion of a Secondary Field-Based Practicum.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Little Rock, AR, November 7-10, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Environment; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; Observation; Preservice Teacher Education; *School Administration; Secondary Education; *Socialization; *Student Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the differences in secondary preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate before and after completion of a field-based practicum experience. It also sought to determine if there were significant relationships between their perceptions of school climate and their grade point average in selected standardized tests. The School Climate Survey was administered to 47 preservice secondary education candidates enrolled in an education practicum course. It was administered, first, after an initial orientation session and again after completion of 30 hours of practicum experience. The survey measured perceptions of: (1) teacher student relationships; (2) security and maintenance; (3) administration; (4) student academic orientation; (5) student behavioral values; (6) counseling/guidance; (7) student-peer relationships; (8) parent and community-school relationships; (9) instructional management; and (10) student activities. Findings indicated that the subjects had more favorable perceptions of school climate after they had an opportunity to observe and participate in secondary schools. Findings also show significant relationships between perceptions of school climate and test scores. (JD)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED314409

# Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate Before and After Completion of a Secondary Field-Based Practicum

Carolyn Williams
Mississippi State University

A Paper Presentation at the Midsouth Educational Research Association's Annual Meeting
Little Rock, Arkansas
November 7-10, 1989

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Williams

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP031 918

## Introduction

During the last two decades, two major types of research studies have dominated the educational literature. They are: (1) research on effective schools, and (2) research related to reform in teacher education programs. Some of the research on school based teacher education programs suggests that "the dominance of practice over scholarship is supported by the belief that teachers learn effective teaching mainly from experience", particularly if they emphasize "reflective teaching techniques" (Lanier & Little, 1986). However, as preservice teacher education programs move toward more liberal arts curriculum and away from courses in methods of teaching, it becomes imperative for preservice teacher education candidates to develop effective skills in observing and reflecting on the classroom and school environments in which they are preparing to teach (Volker, 1988). The focus of this study is to examine the perceptions that preservice teachers develop about the school climate they observe and ask whether the conditions that comprise this experience are in fact perceived as conducive to becoming more knowledgeable about teaching.

Furthermore, the research studies of Brookover et al., (1979) support the premise that school climate...

> "the social system of school influences the role, definition, norms, expectations, values, and beliefs that students internalize and that such socialization affects students' achievement, academic self-concept, and other affective outcomes".

Since initial field-based practicum courses are designed to provide the preservice teacher with the theoretical principles necessary to understand social and ethical issues in teaching including how students learn, how

influenced by teaching, (Iannaccone, 1963; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; Tabachnick, Popkewitz & Zechner, 1979-80) it stands to reason that the preservice teachers' perceptions of the school climate yield deeper understanding of the way theoretical concepts from psychology, curriculum, and sociology are played out in the classroom. Lortie (1975) recommended several ways teacher education programs could be strengthened through more intellectual exchange and enriched experiences. His recommendations included: (1) an increase in the number and diversity of classroom mentors; (2) requirements that teachers observe, evaluate, and justify their assessment of a wide variety of teacher styles and approaches; and (3) opportunities for systematic inquiry during apprenticeship. The initial field-based practicum experience provides one opportunity to involve preservice teachers in observation of classroom teaching and school climate.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in secondary preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate before and after completion of a field-based practicum experience. This study also sought to determine if there were significant relationships between preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate and their grade point average in general education (liberal arts) and professional core courses, and their General Knowledge and Communications Skills scores on the National Teachers Examination.

Research Questions To Be Answered:

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) Were there a significant difference in the preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate before and after completing 30 hours of field-based practicum experiences as measured by the School Climate

field-based practicum experiences as measured by the School Climate Survey, Form A. (1988)?

(2) Were there significant relationships between preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate and any combination of the following variables?

a. grade point averages in general education courses;

b. grade point averages in professional core curriculum courses;

c mean scores on the General Knowledge section of the National Teachers Examination;

d. mean scores on the Communication Skills section of the National Teachers Examination.

Subjects Used in the Study:

The subjects used in this study were forty-seven preservice teacher education candidates enrolled in a secondary education practicum course at Mississippi State University during the fall semester of 1988. Thirteen of the preservice teachers were male and 34 were female. Nineteen majored in mathematics, 15 majored in science, five in English, three in social studies, two in speech, two in foreign language, and one student majored in art education. All preservice teachers had completed at least 45 hours of general education (liberal arts) courses and were in the process of completing admission requirements to teacher education. Admission requirements to teacher education consist of completion of at least 45 hours of general education courses in English composition, natural science, social sciences, humanities, and fine arts, and scores of 651 and 646 on the General Knowledge and Communication Skills sections of the National Teachers Examination.

Instrumentation:

The School Climate Survey developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) was used to measure the preservice teachers' perception of school climate. The instrument was administered to the preservice teachers immediately after an initial orientation session with the principal or assistant principals and again after completion of 30 hours of practicum experiences in two different classrooms in a comprehensive municipal school district. The alpha coefficient for the climate subscales ranges from 0.73 to 0.87 based on a national pilot study with more than 1500 teacher in 1985. The 55 items used to measure school climate are reported in subscales and include measures of perceptions of:

(1) Teacher-Student Relationships. Perceptions about the quality of the interpersonal and professional relationships between teachers and students.

(2) Security and Maintenance. Perceptions about the quality of maintenance and the degree of security people feel at the school.

(3) Administration. Perceptions of the degree to which school administrators are effective in communicating with different role groups and in setting high performance expectations for teachers and students.

(4) Student Academic Orientation. Perceptions about student attention to task and concern for achievement of a school.

(5) Student Behavioral Values. Perceptions about student self-discipline and tolerance for others.

(6) Guidance. Perceptions of the quality of academic guidance and career guidance and personal counseling services available to students.

(7) Student-Peer Relationships. Perceptions about students' care and respect for one another and their mutual cooperation.

(8) Parent and Community-School Relationships. Perceptions of the amount and quality of involvement in the school of parents and other community members.

(9) Instructional Management. Perceptions of the efficiency and effectiveness of teacher classroom organizations and use of classroom time.

(10) Student Activities. Perceptions about opportunities for and actual participation of students in school-sponsored activities.

Mean scores on the General Knowledge and Communication Skills sections of the National Teachers Examination were used as to assess the entry level preparation of preservice teachers.

Description of Secondary Practicum Experiences:

The Practicum in Secondary Education courses is the initial field experience course required for all secondary education preservice teacher candidates. This course is typically taken by preservice teachers after completion of 45 hours of general education courses and may be taken concurrently with either subject matter courses and/or professional education core curriculum courses.

The course provides school experiences such as observation of teaching, interviews with classroom teachers and school personnel and instructional assistance to teachers. The preservice teacher are required to meet once a week for an instructional seminar throughout the semester as they complete the practical experiences. Course work scheduled during the ensuing semester placed substantial emphasis on classroom practices and theoretical rationales underlying each practice. Research findings on teaching and instruction were required readings. The participating school districts play a substantial and significant role in the preservice teachers initial perceptions of teaching in secondary schools prior to the student teaching experience. The preservice teachers are evaluated on the bases of successful completion of the 30 hours of practicum experiences and are guided by the following checklists:

Observation of

1. the administrators leadership style;
2. student behavior and conduct;
3. teachers performance in the classroom;
4. curriculum guides;
5. research on school climates;
6. research on teacher expectations;
7. research on student academic orientation;
8. lesson plan preparation, format, content, teaching procedures, student learning activities, interclass grouping procedures, and evaluation procedures;
9. classroom management and disciplinary procedures;
10. nonteaching duties of teachers;
11. due process and legal classroom behavior of teachers and students;
12. ethical use of student records;
13. evaluation of effective teaching.

During the semester, preservice teachers are required to keep a daily log for each hour of observation and are asked to compare the content of required readings with what is actually observed in the schools. During the last half of the semester, the preservice teachers make an oral presentation on which they reflect on their field experiences.

Description of the School District:

The participating school district in which the secondary preservice teachers were assigned was comprehensive junior and senior high school in Northeast Mississippi. The junior high school was composed of a population over 600 students in grades seven and eight of diverse cultural, educational,

and socioeconomical backgrounds. The high school was composed of a population of over 1000 students with similar backgrounds as the junior high school students. Over seventy percent of the classroom teachers employed in the school district held advanced degrees. Publications by the school district reveal that it has an exemplary academic curriculum for a school of its size in Mississippi with a large number of semi-merit and merit finalists, above average ACT and SAT scores among its graduates. An examination of local newspapers accounts revealed a high concentration of parent and community involvement.

## Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed via use of t tests and multiple regression statistical techniques. The t test was used to analyze the differences between the preservice teachers perceptions of school climate before and after completion of observation techniques. Multiple regression statistical techniques were used to determine if there were significant relationships between school climate and the mean grade point averages in general education courses and professional core curriculum courses, as well as mean scores on General Knowledge and Communication Skills of the National Teachers Examination.

## Results of the Study

As shown in Table 1, significant differences, at the .05 level, were found between the total mean scores of preservice teachers perceptions of school climate before and after completion of 30 hours of observation. The total mean scores of the preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate were significantly higher after the field-based practicum experience.

(insert Table 1 here)

When the mean subscale scores on the School Climate Survey were analyzed, there were significant differences, at the .05 levels on the following subscales: (1) Teacher-Student Relationships; (2) Security and Maintenance; (7) Student-Peer Relationships; (8) Parent and Community Relationships; and (9) Instructional Management. No significant differences were found between the preservice teachers perceptions of school climate before and after completion of the field-based practicum experiences on the following subscales: (3) Administration; (4) Student Academic Orientation; (5) Student Behavior Values; (6) Guidance, and (10) Student Activities.

(insert Table 2 here)

As shown in Table 3, there were no significant correlations between the preservice teachers' perceptions of school climate and their mean grade point averages in the general education or professional core courses. However, there were significant correlations between the preservice teachers perceptions of school climate after 30 hours of field-based experiences and their mean NTE scores on the Communication Skills and general knowledge sections at the .05 levels of significance.

(insert Table 3 here)

## Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study have shown that secondary preservice teachers have different perceptions of the school climate after completion of 30 hours of field-based experiences. The preservice teachers in this study have more favorable perceptions of school climate after they have had the opportunity to observe and participate in secondary schools environment than before. Since initial field experiences enable preservice teachers to explore teaching and the school environment, the School Climate Survey seems to serve as a valuable instrument to assess the perceptions preservice teachers' develop regarding the academic and social environments in which they are preparing to work.

The findings of this study have also shown there are significant relationships between the secondary preservice teachers perceptions of school climate and their scores on the general knowledge and communication sections of the National Teachers Examination. Of major interest are the findings that preservice teachers with the lower scores on these sections of the NTE tended to show more favorable perceptions of the school climate. These findings raise several questions for teacher educators. (1) Are preservice teachers less reflective if they earn lower scores on the NTE? (2) Do preservice teachers with higher communication and general knowledge scores on the NTE tend to be more reflective of the school environment? The answers to these questions would yield valuable information regarding the preparation of beginning teachers.

References

Brookover, W. B., Beady, C., Flood, P., Schweitzer, J., & Wisenbaker, J. (1979). School social systems and student achievement: Schools can make a difference. New York: Praeger.

Iannaccone, L. (1963). Student teaching: A transitional stage in the making of a teacher. Theory into Practice, 2, 73-80.

Jackson, P. (1968). Life in Classrooms. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Lanier, J. E. & Little, J. W. (1986). Research on teacher education. Handbook on Research on Teaching. New York: Macmillian Publishing Company.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1963). A manual for the administration of the school climate survey, form A. Reston, VA.

Tabachnick, B. R., Popkewita, T. S., & Zeichner, K. M. (1979-1980). Teacher education and the professional perspectives of student teachers Interchange, 10(4), 12-29.

Volker, R. (1988). Methods for fostering teacher education students' reflective analysis of research on teaching, Images of Reflection in Teacher Education, 32-33.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t values Between Pretest and Posttest Total Scores on the School Climate Survey

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | t value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Before (N=47) | 192.89 | 33.59 | -2.86* |
| After (N+47) | 205.83 | 16.66 | |

*Significant at .05 level.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and t values Between Pretest and Posttest Subscale Scores on the School Climate Survey

| Subscales | Pretest (N=47) X | SD | Posttest (N=47) X | SD | t values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher-Student Relationships | 43.0 | 9.0 | 47.6 | 4.9 | -3.4* |
| Security | 26.6 | 5.4 | 29.1 | 3.1 | -3.1* |
| Administration | 21.4 | 3.6 | 22.0 | 3.0 | -1.0 |
| Student Academic Orientation | 13.3 | 3.7 | 14.1 | 2.6 | -1.4 |
| Guidance | 13.3 | 3.3 | 13.8 | 1.8 | 1.0 |
| Student Peer Relationships | 13.9 | 2.9 | 15.2 | 2.1 | -2.9* |
| Parent and Community Relationships | 13.3 | 2.4 | 13.2 | 1.6 | .58 |
| Instructional Management | 25.5 | 4.5 | 27.7 | 2.6 | -2.5* |
| Student Activities | 14.5 | 2.5 | 15.2 | 1.3 | -1.7 |

*Significant at .05 level.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Correlations of Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate and Selected Variables of Grade Point Averages in General Education and Professional Courses, and mean scores on the Communication Skills and General Knowledge Sections of the National Teachers Examination

| Variables Entered | R | $R^2$ | $R^2$Change | Simple R | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GRA - General Education Courses | .20488 | .04198 | .04198 | .20488 | 2.0 |
| NTE - Communication Skills | .22527 | .05075 | .00877 | -.05058 | 11.9* |
| NTE - General Knowledge | .50100 | .25100 | .20025 | -.18828 | 11.7* |
| GPA - Professional Core | .53800 | .28945 | .03845 | -.16550 | 2.6 |

*Significant at the .05 level.